

# Facebook Founder to Donate \$100 Million to Help Remake Newark's Schools

By RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA



Mark Zuckerberg, chief executive and a founder of Facebook, has agreed to donate \$100 million to improve the long-troubled public schools in Newark, and Gov. Chris Christie will cede some control of the state-run system to Mayor Cory A. Booker in conjunction with the

huge gift, officials said Wednesday.

The three men plan to announce the arrangement on Friday on the "Oprah Winfrey Show."

The changes would not formally relax the legal power the state seized in 1995, when it declared Newark's schools a failure and took control of the system, replacing the elected school board with a mostly toothless advisory board. Rather, Mr. Christie plans to give the mayor a major role in choosing a new superintendent and redesigning the system, but to retain the right to take control back.

For now, at least, the arrangement tightens an already friendly relationship between the governor, a Republican, and the mayor, a Democrat who was once seen as a likely challenger for the State House in 2013. It also promises to be a rare happy moment in a state troubled by budget crises, scandals, political



infighting and, most recently, the loss of a \$400 million federal education grant because of a clerical error.

Mr. Zuckerberg, 26, who grew up in Westchester County and now lives in California, has no particular connection to Newark. But in July, he and Mr. Booker met at a conference and began a continuing conversation about the mayor's plans for the city, according to people familiar with their relationship.

Mr. Booker, an advocate of school choice, has been traveling the country, meeting business leaders and celebrities, proselytizing and raising money for Newark. Ms. Winfrey has been one of his biggest supporters, and has given millions of dollars to schools and other organizations in Newark over the last few years.

The \$100 million for Newark is the initial gift to start a foundation for education financed by Mr. Zuckerberg. This would be by far the largest publicly known gift by Mr. Zuckerberg, whose fortune Forbes magazine estimated last year at \$2 billion.

Mr. Booker, Mr. Christie and Mr. Zuckerberg all declined to be interviewed on Wednesday. The

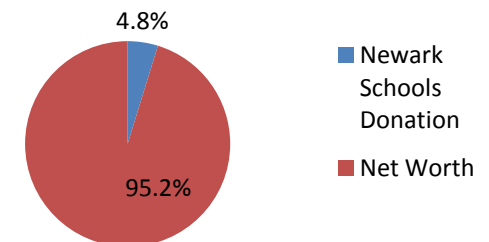
officials who spoke about the plan did so on the condition of anonymity because it was two days before the scheduled announcement.

The gift is many times larger than any the system has received, officials said — an extraordinary sum not only for a district with an \$800 million annual operating budget, but also for any publicly financed government agency. It is not yet clear how the money would be used, or over what period.

Despite 15 years of state control, the Newark schools have test scores and graduation rates that are among the lowest in New Jersey.

Mr. Christie has said that he generally does not approve of state takeovers of local agencies, and

**Mark Zuckerberg's  
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he supported the elimination of state oversight of Camden early this year. But he had given no sign of backing away from control of the schools in Newark.

Less than a month ago, the governor informed the city’s schools superintendent, Clifford B. Janey, that he would not be rehired, and that the state was looking for a successor. There has been speculation in Trenton about the possibility of hiring Michelle A. Rhee, the hard-charging schools chief in Washington, whose political patron, Mayor Adrian M. Fenty, recently lost his bid for re-election.

Officials said Mr. Christie planned to announce

that he and Mr. Booker would jointly select a new superintendent, a decision the governor has the power to make on his own. And they said he would instruct the mayor to come up with a reform plan for the system: in effect, asking Mr. Booker to redesign it.

“We can’t speculate too much at this point about what the specifics would be,” a person briefed on the plans said.

But on issues like expansion of charter schools, rigorous testing and rewarding teachers and administrators whose students succeed, this person said, “their vision is very much in step.”

Under Mr. Christie, the state has rewarded schools that made aggressive changes, like awarding grants to a group of Newark high schools that replaced half their staffs.

The announcements could win points for Mr. Christie with local officials and school advocates who have chafed under state control, and take away some of the sting of his cuts to state aid for schools. It also ties him more closely to a popular Democrat in a state that usually favors Democrats. But the move could damage his alliance with the mayor if, in the end, their visions do not match.

It also puts Mr. Booker in a situation not occupied by his predecessors, who had little overt influence over the schools. The mayor has said many times that he wants the state to cede control, but critics have charged that he did little to make that happen. If his reform plan fails to transform the system, it could deal a blow to his reputation.

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From Left to Right: Gov. Chris Christie, Oprah Winfrey, Newark Mayor Corey Booker and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

Mark Zuckerberg Profile	
Age	
Residence	
Est. Net Worth	
Description of the Article	

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